

The President's Daily Brief

18 May 1972



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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

18 May 1972

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Soviet leaders appear to be preparing the Soviet public for President Nixon's visit and providing a justification for their policy of restraint in Vietnam. (Page 1)

The USSR's ambassador to China is reported to have suddenly left for Moscow. (Page 2)

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in South Vietnam. The fighting remains at a relatively low level. (Page 3)

Following yesterday's favorable vote in the Bundestag, Bonn's Eastern treaties still face the final hurdle of approval by the upper house Bundesrat. (Page 5)

The latest satellite photography of Soviet ICBM launch complexes shows no new silo construction. (Page 6)

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The candidacy of former Cambodian deputy prime minister In Tam will add credibility to the presidential elections next month but Lon Nol should have little difficulty winning. (Page 8)

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Major Soviet newspapers on 16 and 17 May carried lead articles emphasizing the wisdom of negotiating solutions to problems. Izvestia, for example, although it did not mention the US directly, called for a settlement of international problems through negotiations, "not confrontation." The articles reiterated support for North Vietnam, but in such a way as to suggest that negotiations offer the best way of ending the war.

On the Moscow evening television news on 16 May, the commentator, V. Sharagin, declared that "despite the stormy course of events," the USSR seeks the solution of international problems at the negotiating table. In noting that the President will begin his visit next week, he explained that the talks will review all outstanding questions with the aim of improving bilateral relations and strengthening the outlook for peace.

Soviet leaders appear to be preparing the Soviet public for the President's visit and providing a justification for their policy of restraint in Vietnam. In fact, Sharagin's commentary invoked party chief Brezhnev's authority in defending this policy, thereby perhaps warning critics of the imprudence of continued carping. Apart from possible misgivings at higher levels, Soviet propagandists have been confronted in recent days with questions from their audiences about the propriety of receiving the President while the US is attacking North Vietnam.

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According to the AFP correspondent in Peking, Soviet Ambassador to China Tolstikov has suddenly left for Moscow.

The most obvious explanation for Tolstikov's return would be that he is to participate in last-minute deliberations regarding the President's visit to Moscow. He might also have been recalled to provide an up-to-date reading of how China intends to handle the issue of overland supply of North Vietnam.

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The North Vietnamese, meanwhile, are continuing to move substantial volumes of supplies to various battlefronts in South Vietnam. Intercepts [REDACTED] show a heavy flow of supplies on routes through the DMZ, as well as from Laos, into northern Military Region 1 and the central highlands. To handle this flow, the North Vietnamese recently moved one logistic unit from Laos to the Hue area and have now deployed two more such units to the two northern provinces of South Vietnam.

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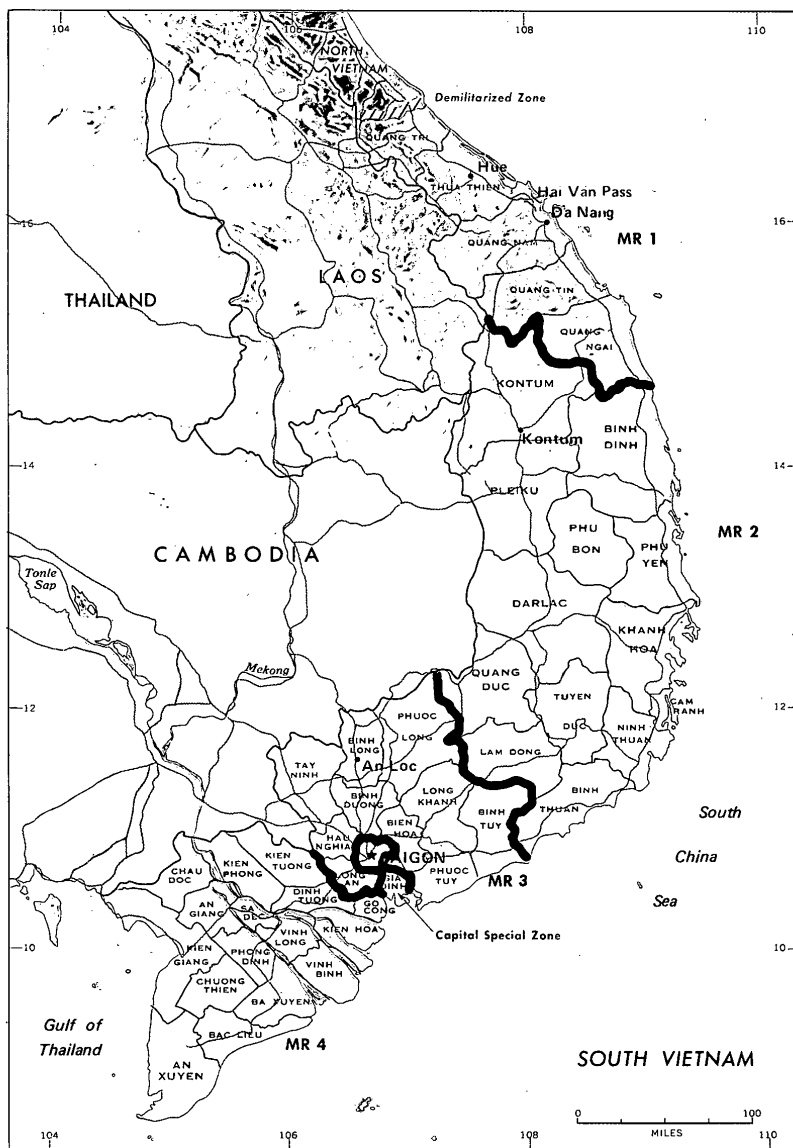
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South Vietnam's major battlefields are relatively quiet as both sides get ready for increased activity. The Communists have interdicted Route 1



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between Hue and Da Nang by damaging a large bridge just north of the Hai Van Pass. Government forces are conducting operations west of Hue and have recaptured three positions.

Enemy pressure on Kontum City during the past two days has included shellings of the airport that destroyed three transport planes and two helicopters. With overland routes to Kontum frequently being interdicted, attacks against the airfield and aircraft trying to use it will complicate operations to resupply the city.

The government task force that is trying to open Route 13 to An Loc has so far made little progress. Late on 16 May, however, two 155-mm. howitzers were set up about five miles from the city, thus providing the defenders with the first direct artillery support they have had since the enemy siege began in early April.

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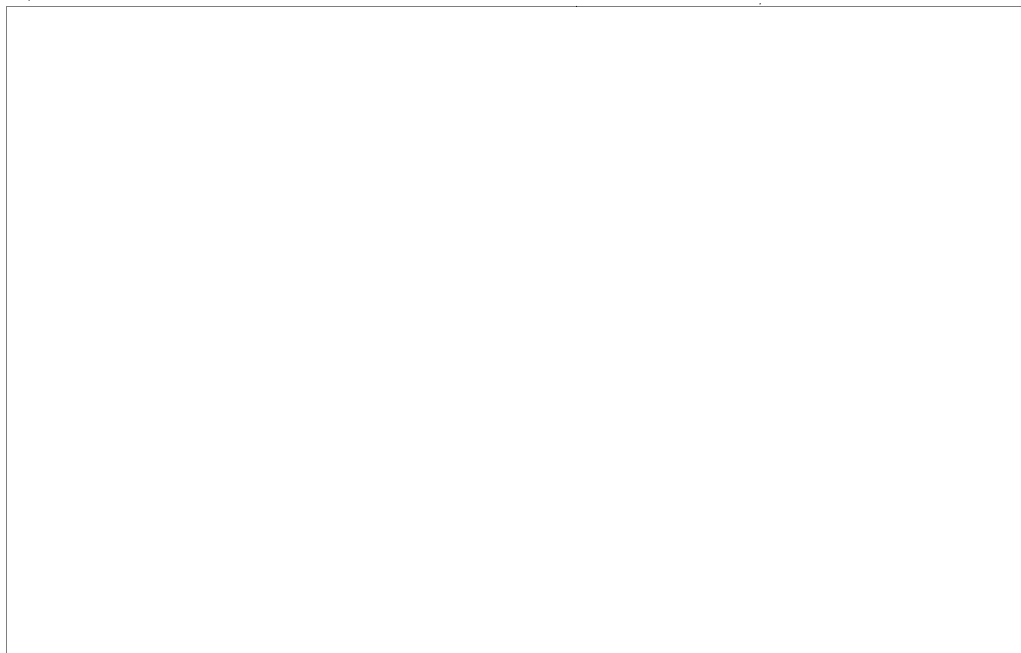
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WEST GERMANY

Following yesterday's favorable vote in the Bundestag, Bonn's Eastern treaties still face the final hurdle of approval by the upper house Bundesrat. Christian Democratic leader Barzel, however, has given assurances that his party will not pose any difficulties for the treaties there. This vote was originally set for Friday but may be delayed for a week.

In yesterday's Bundestag vote, the Soviet and Polish treaties passed with massive abstentions by the opposition. The voting came after a marathon opposition caucus on 16-17 May, in which Barzel failed in his attempt to get a majority of the deputies to vote for the treaties. He had to settle for a compromise that, while assuring ratification, appeased party conservatives by allowing the deputies to show their dislike of the treaties by abstaining.

Although Barzel managed to convince most of his deputies that the party could not afford to defeat the treaties, his maneuvering has exacerbated disagreement within opposition ranks over Eastern policy. He is likely to face further trouble from party conservatives on this score.



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USSR

The latest satellite photography, which covered portions of 17 of the 24 ICBM launch complexes, shows no new silo construction. Work on the last new ICBM silo began in July 1971.

Work continues on the 60 small and six large new-type silos at Pervomaysk and Derazhnya. The first group of these new small silos probably will be externally complete in late 1972, but installation of internal equipment will not come until after that.

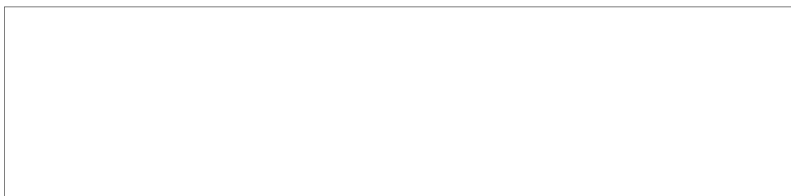
Construction of the 25 large new-type silos at five SS-9 ICBM complexes is also continuing, but at a slower pace. The first group of these large new silos probably will not be externally complete before early 1973.

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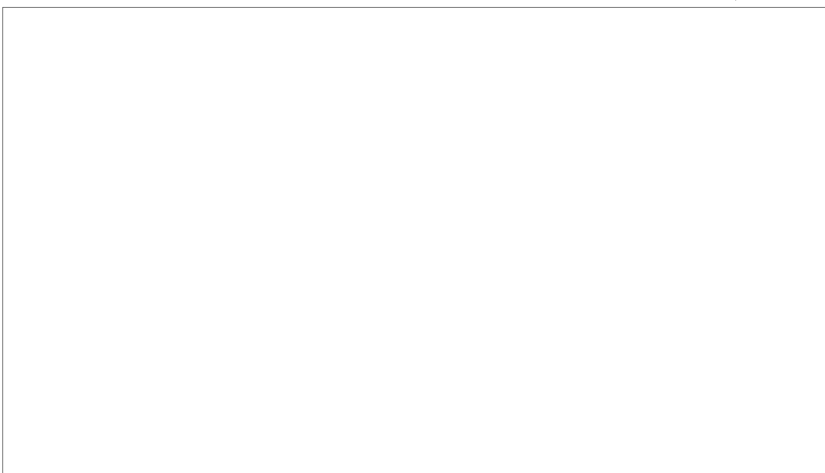
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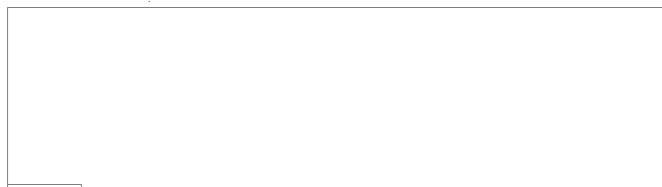
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CAMBODIA

Former deputy prime minister In Tam has announced that he will be a candidate in the presidential elections scheduled for 4 June.

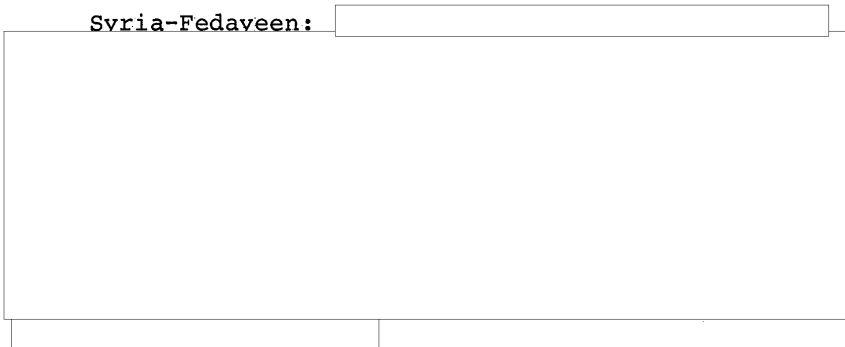
Of the four individuals who have filed to run against Lon Nol, only In Tam seems likely to gain much support, and his candidacy will add to the credibility of the elections. It seems unlikely, however, that he could beat Lon Nol or even, in combination with the other three candidates, prevent Lon Nol from getting the majority necessary to prevent a runoff election. Lon Nol has already obtained the important endorsement of the military establishment, and efforts are under way to ensure that the troops and their dependents get out and vote.

In what may be a bid to obtain the backing of Sirik Matak's supporters in the election, Lon Nol has managed to persuade Matak to accept a post as "special adviser" to the president. The duties of this new position have yet to be defined, but Matak will have the same rank and privileges as prime minister. The appointment may also have been made in order to pave the way for Matak's eventual designation as vice president. In any case the move to bring Matak back into the government will be unpopular with Phnom Penh's disgruntled students, whose protests forced Matak to quit in March.

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